

Downtown Commission Meeting
Minutes of May 14, 2010
8:30 a.m.
1st Floor North Conference Room - City Hall

Present: Vice-Chairman Dwight Butner, Presiding; Councilman Jan Davis, Mr. Byron Greiner, Mr. Michael McDonough, Mr. Matthew Sprouse, Ms. Rebecca Hecht, Mr. Jimi Rentz, Ms. Pamela Myers and Mr. Bruce Hazzard

Absent: Ms. Kitty Love and Mr. Guadalupe Chavarria

Vice-Chairman Butner called the meeting to order at 8:30 p.m. and informed the audience of the public hearing process.

Administrative

- ? Vice-Chairman Butner welcomed new Commissioner Rebecca Hecht and Commissioner Jimi Rentz.
- ? Mr. Greiner moved to approve the minutes of the April 9, 2010, meeting. This motion was seconded by Mr. Sprouse and carried unanimously.
- ? It was the consensus of the Commission to establish the following members on the Nominating Subcommittee for the Downtown Commission leadership with a vote taking place in June 2010: Mr. Hazzard, Mr. Sprouse and Ms. Love

Updates

Downtown Association

Mr. Greiner noted that May 21 starts their first Downtown After 5 this year and the Pritchard Park programming has begun. They are still waiting from a report from City Attorney Oast on the issue of handicapped parking.

Pack Square

Ms. Myers said that the grand opening events of Pack Square Park are scheduled on May 28 and invited all the Downtown Commission members to attend.

Downtown Task Force

Urban Planner Alan Glines said that they met and talked about the street closing policy. Comment was also requested on the draft scope of downtown services provided by the City. The list of County downtown services is also being followed-up on.

Downtown Master Plan Implementation

Ms. Sasha Vrtunski, Downtown Master Plan Project Manager, said that on May 25 the Downtown Commission will be giving their annual update to City Council and also on that same date she will be providing an update on the Downtown Master Plan implementation. She briefly updated them on her report of the different subcommittees via a matrix. Overall she feels good about the progress.

There was a brief discussion regarding the need for a city-wide Arts Commission to ensure the vibrancy of the cultural arts in our community.

She noted that the Performing Arts Center is working on their site analysis and there will be public input in the fall. In addition, Mt. Zion and Eagle/Market Streets are working on their projects.

In response to Mr. McDonough, Ms. Vrtunski said that the long-term planning for parks is on a list for the Downtown Commission to consider, amongst other things. Vice-Chairman Butner asked that the Downtown Management Subcommittee discuss Strategy 3.

Central Business District Closures & Park Permitting

Mr. Glines said that presently we have a street closing policy that is fairly limited as it considers public safety and transit, but it doesn't consider economic impact. He understood that the Downtown Commission would like to have a role in street closures and to create some guidelines to close that gap and look how to evaluate street closure and other festival-type proposals. From a review standpoint, it would also be helpful for a planner of an event to engage in an informal discussion with key City staff to get feedback and problem-solve. Ms. Myers noted that the informal discussion came up when there was no communication between the event planner and stakeholders ahead of time.

Mr. Glines recalled that people have to submit their information 6 weeks ahead of time for a small event and up to 3 months ahead of time for a large event.

Mr. Glines said that depending on the Downtown Commission's role, it may require an ordinance amendment by City Council.

In response to Mr. Sprouse, Ms. Bernstein said that the Downtown Commission's role did not include having authority to grant street closures or not. That would require an ordinance change. Out of the meeting two items were discussed - one was fixing the existing process by streamlining and making it more comprehensive; and the other one was the more subjective review covered by the Downtown Commission.

Vice-Chairman Butner felt that earlier policies were geared toward getting as many people downtown as possible, but our downtown has changed significantly and we now we need to be more selective. He felt a policy should be established that no street should ever be closed at all in downtown because we are full. No business should ever be blocked because they are generating tax dollars. The disposition should be that nothing should interfere with what we have downtown. Anything that does interfere with that should be an exception. It's not that we don't want festivals, we just don't want street closures.

Ms. Hecht's questioned whether Bele Chere or Downtown After 5 would be grandfathered or would they have to be reviewed each year. Vice-Chairman Butner felt the challenge is to make Bele Chere harmonize with what is existing in downtown now. But, once you make the policy change, your answer about street closings will be worked out from the questions you ask from that policy change.

Mr. Rentz, being a festival organizer, he sees both sides, but he feels that expediency is a key when you have the informal meeting with key City staff.

Ms. Myers felt this comes into alignment with the community calendar that can be used to keep track of all the events.

Councilman Davis felt we must be careful in adding another level of review. He would prefer a matrix or some objective criteria that needs to be met, understanding that there are exceptions to all rules. He doesn't want to constrain the organic nature of downtown because

there are some suffering businesses and empty storefronts downtown. If the role of the Downtown Commission changes to review these street closings, then Council will need to look at the appointment process differently as they are now looking at appointments from a design form effect and not an economic effect.

In response to Councilman Davis, Vice-Chairman Butner said that we need policies and standards of what we want to see happen in an affirmative sense.

Ms. Hecht felt that the first question in the matrix should be whether the event could be located in a park.

Ms. Myers felt that the economic impact of the street closure is measurable and we need to do a better job of requiring promoters to measure them. She agreed that a stakeholder commitment is necessary and that the burden of getting that support rests with the promoter, not with the notification from the City.

Mr. McDonough expressed some philosophical concerns. He hears that open streets are fundamental to successful business downtown and it seems that our goal should be how can we have successful business downtown without having to worry about whether streets are closed or not. The goal is to get people downtown. He couldn't understand why cars have to drive on the streets in order for businesses to feel comfortable. Again, he felt our goal should be how to keep our downtown vital whether the streets are closed or not. He felt we should share our streets with everyone.

In reply to Mr. McDonough, Mr. Hecht felt it was important to note that how the event is planned is important, like a booth set up in front of an existing business.

Ms. Bernstein said that the draft street closing policy discussed at the May 4 meeting was a draft. The Director of Transportation Ken Putnam will be working with Director of Building Safety Robert Griffin on finalizing the policy.

Mr. Griffin agreed with Mr. Sprouse's comment about different tiers of review. Since permitting for the events have been in his department for less than two months, he has been reviewing the process. He endorsed incorporating more input and dialogue. As far as the road closures, we want a City-wide policy; however, because Pack Square Park is coming on line we felt we needed a process around the Park. He would like to have the Downtown Commission's input about how we have formulated the policy around Pack Square Park. The three major factors regarding street closures around Pack Square Park are (1) access for police and fire; (2) re-routing of transit; and (3) third is egress and ingress from the existing buildings when booths or vendors are set up.

It was the consensus of the Downtown Commission to have City staff provide them with the final draft of the street closing policy as soon as possible in order to give the Commission an opportunity to review it before action is taken. Vice-Chairman Butner said that this item will be placed on the Commission's June agenda for action.

In response to Ms. Myers, Mr. Glines said that staff is looking at street closure fees vs. park fees. He will provide the Downtown Commission with the results for review and then it will need to be reviewed by the City's Finance Committee.

After Mr. Glines suggested a special meeting to discuss the Downtown Master Plan implementation and the continuation of the street closure discussion, upon suggestion of Vice-Chairman Butner, it was the consensus of the Commission to continue the subcommittee and expand its mandate to include those things.

Downtown Master Plan Unified Development Ordinance Changes

Mr. Glines briefly explained that the Urban Design Subcommittee has held many meetings and they have put Downtown Master Plan (DTMP) wording amendments into a matrix consisting of Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) reference, related action step from DTMP, current UDO requirement, proposed amendment, staff comment, and Design Action Committee comments. Strategies 4 and 5 deal mostly with the UDO changes.

From the last meeting, Mr. Glines said that the Urban Design Subcommittee reviewed some of the Commission's recommendations (height and expansion of the Central Business District) and outlined those changes and/or responses from the Subcommittee.

Discussion was then held during Mr. Glines' and Ms. Bernstein's detailed review (with maps) of items 16 through 24 on the matrix, with emphasis on the Design Action Committee's recommendations. Mr. Glines said that due to time constraints, the remainder of the matrix would be discussed at the Commission's next meeting.

In response to Vice-Chairman Butner, Mr. Glines said that after the Downtown Commission reviews and approves these changes, the next step will be Planning & Zoning Commission review.

Public Comment

Mr. Steve Rasmussen was pleased at how the Subcommittee's work has progressed.

Adjournment

At 10:26 p.m., Mr. Greiner moved to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Myers and carried unanimously.